

SCHOOL DISTRICT REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

Minutes of Meeting
Thursday, March 30, 2006
Yavapai College – Performance Hall, Prescott

George Martinez called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m. and attendance was noted by the secretary.

Members Present

Doris Goodale
Vicki Anderson
Dr. Sandra Dowling
Michael Hunter
Rita Leyva
Dave Naugle
George Martinez
Thomas Schoaf

Members Absent

Martin Schultz
Jay Blanchard
Kent Scribner
Art Harding
Joseph Thomas

Speakers Present

Justin Greene, Union Elementary School
Manuel Madrid, Superintendent and Principal, Concho School District
Kathleen Fleenor, Superintendent and Principal, Clarkdale-Jerome School District #3
John D. Warren, Principal, Topock Elementary School
Kevin Brown, Superintendent, Flagstaff Unified School District #1

INTRODUCTIONS AND REMARKS:

George Martinez welcomed the public (about 35 in attendance) and gave the agenda for the evening, stressing the importance of public input. He offered special thanks to Commissioner Rita Leyva for her assistance organizing the Prescott hearing and arranging such a wonderful site. He introduced State Senator Linda Gray and the Superintendent of Yavapai County Schools, Tim Carter. Mr. Martinez said that all 13 Commissioners were volunteers serving the state of Arizona and the purpose of their charge is to improve education in Arizona.

Mr. Martinez then presented a PowerPoint presentation on the work of the Commission (attached).

Following the presentation Mr. Martinez said the Commissioners would maintain focus on improving education, balancing local control and building trust when facing the complex requirements of the law. He then asked if any of the Commissioners would like to add any comments.

Michael Hunter said he had worked closely with Senator Gray while the bill was being developed and there were many reasons and organizations supporting the bill. For example the teachers union supported the issues of curriculum alignment and top heavy administration. Many were interested in improving education. The object is not unification for the sake of unification but to unify where it makes sense.

George Martinez took questions from the audience:

Kathleen Fleenor, Superintendent/Principal of Clarkdale School District in Verde Valley spoke. Because they have a high percentage of Native American students she is concerned that they would lose \$217,000 per year including Impact Aid, REAP and Title VII funds. They are a K-8, highly achieving school. They meet yearly to align with the high school including text books. She was concerned about the impact for projected growth of 1178 new homes coming in a few years.

Commissioner Sandra Dowling asked what high school they feed into and Ms. Fleenor answered, Mingus Union in Cottonwood. She said their Native American funds are based on a student percentage; of 400 students, 58 are Native American.

Commissioner Dowling asked if they had considered the possibility of becoming a K-12 district. Mr. Carter said he will help find that information. Becoming a K-12 district might add more funding.

Commissioner Thomas Schoaf said that all concerned need to broaden their thinking and not just think in terms of consolidation.

Commission Dowling asked the public to think about transportation issues. In rural Arizona she would like the public to consider climate conditions and what is a reasonable amount of time for students to be on the bus. She asked to consider other obstacles including the cost of transportation.

Manuel Madrid, Superintendent and Principal of Concho School District said he had worked in Clark county, the 6th largest school district in the country. He said that bigger is not better. They had kindergarten classes with 30 students. The curriculum was disappointing. He compared Clark County schools with St. Johns, Arizona saying that St. Johns had better technology than Clark County.

He was dean of 3000 students in Clark County and was not allowed to meet with parents unless they had an appointment. In St. Johns they take pride and can meet with people even without an appointment. In Clark County the administrators ruled the roost and the community had little impact. He is now Superintendent and Principal of Concho School District. He said they are not hicks. They have consortiums for purchasing at good prices. Personnel costs in Concho are 77%. He said the best Superintendents are in rural districts. He runs into his neighbors whenever he is out in the community. He encourages the commission to find more cost effective help for schools.

Commissioner Hunter responded to Mr. Madrid: Concho is a pre-K-8 school. Some students go on to St. Johns High School, Blue Ridge, Show Low and others Snowflake. Consolidating Concho students into St Johns is not in the charge of the commission.

Mr. Madrid said he was glad to hear that. He said they take pride in their student achievement.

Commissioner Dowling said the Commission does not want to be known as the consolidating commission. The charge is not consolidation but unification. She asked the public to please take this message back to the community. The Commission wants to know what direction each community wishes to go.

Senator Gray said the intent of bill is not consolidation. She doesn't want Arizona districts to be like Clark County. She said even Tucson could be too large. With a high school of 3000 students not many kids can play on teams or serve on boards. She would like to see smaller schools and smaller classes. The problem is that with fewer students the revenue is lower and teachers get less pay. The intent of the bill and the charge of the Commission are to make things better. They don't want to make kids travel. Sedona formed their own district so kids didn't have to travel to Flagstaff. There is no objective to make big school districts.

Tim Foist, Superintendent of Yuma Union High School District, and President of the Arizona School Administrators (ASA), said that Arizona administrative costs are less than the national average.

Kevin Brown, Superintendent of Flagstaff asked if the commission will look at the issue of district public schools and district public charter schools? Now that we have a dual public system, how can we unify district public schools and charter public schools?

Commissioner Hunter said the Charter School movement is historic in Arizona. Efficiencies in charters could be looked at as a state, but not by this commission. It is possible to look at charter schools for possible data because they are experimental.

Commissioner Hunter said that the Superintendent of Phoenix Union High School, Raj Chopra, supported the bill but the 13 feeder districts did not. He said no one made the case to unify all thirteen, saying Arizona does not want to be like Clark County. The Commission might consider an option to split up Phoenix Union. All recommendations

are subject to voter approval. Even before the bill, statutes allowed unification but it rarely happened. Kingman did this and it was a difficult process. Previous to this bill school district governing boards would put a plan forth.

Commissioner Hunter gave a hypothetical example: Glendale High School has two elementary feeder schools. Washington generally has support to possibly unify and the same for Glendale High School. Glendale Elementary does not have unification support. Unifying the three schools might be worth putting to the voters. If Glendale Elementary says no, the whole thing is scraped.

Commissioner Hunter said it is important to think of the potential problems funding changes could cause. For example, the small school adjustment factor lifts the cap on budget limit and could be an important factor. It is very important that the Commission hears from the public to make the best decisions.

John Warren, Principal of Topock Elementary School in Mohave County said he is dismayed that the commission doesn't have plans to meet all over rural Arizona. Mr. Warren traveled 200 miles to be here today. He grew up in Sonoita and his Tombstone High School had 75 in the grade class. Half of the students earned bachelors and higher degrees. He is now in an unincorporated area. He is afraid another district would take them over, take the ADM, and bus the kids to another school.

Mr. Warren said he has heard and is worried that 12,000-25,000 students is the optimum district size recommendation.

Commissioner Martinez said a meeting may be scheduled for Yuma, and perhaps Commissioner Blanchard is working on this. The Commission is trying to determine where to go and is interested in recommendations from the public.

Commissioner Hunter said he served on the Unification and Consolidation Commission that met in previous years. That Commission never reached a consensus recommendation on district size. He said a large district can still have good community involvement. He doesn't know if the commission will determine a proper size for districts. This is a huge issue and there are lots of different views nationally. Size is one issue to consider in the individual cases.

Commissioner Martinez said that one study showed that students with higher socio economic status do better in large districts. Maybe the Commission will be able to apply some of the research to guide decision making.

Commissioner Naugle said that in Sonoita students go to many different schools and there is no consistency in the curriculum for all the feeder schools and high schools making it very difficult to effectively teach. He said that if the Commission wants their suggestions to be approved by voters they need to know and reflect the communities concerns.

Justin Green, of Union Elementary School District in Tolleson, says they grew from 35 students to 4000. They used a consortium to save money. He asked the Commission what happens when a plan is offered and the voters say no. Commissioner Hunter said they could try again, but wouldn't keep trying over and over. Mr. Green said he didn't believe voters would approve any changes.

Commissioner Dowling says Tolleson Union has been approved for a 5th high school. The Commission's charge is not to assign feeders to a high school. They are looking to streamline the system. A variety of things could happen and this is a unique scenario.

Commissioner Hunter says Union Elementary has an interesting history because they used to get the small school adjustment but then student growth set them up for a fall when they lost this. This commission can't help this problem. Some schools work hard to keep population under 125.

Commissioner Martinez said the Commission should ask why Arizona districts are set up the way they are. Should the Commission look more at the history of how these districts were founded? What is their legacy? What is founding rationale? Does that rationale make sense today? The Commission would like to gather that history.

Senator Gray asked the audience to go to page 3 of the bill. The commission "may" decide to unify a common school. If it is not in the best interest of kids the commission will not recommend unification.

Commissioner Anderson said the Commission should look at the transitions from elementary to middle and then to high school. High school teachers have a hard time teaching if students come from different schools and learned different things. This could lead to dropouts. She also said that it is easier to implement changes in unified districts. And that it is easier to include art, music and libraries in a unified district.

Commissioner Martinez asked the public to send comments and input as much as they like. He reminded the public of the website where input can be submitted and asked the audience to fill out the stamped comment cards provided. He offered to return and provide an update on the Commissions work stressing the importance of communication. He said he was impressed with how many superintendents, principals and administrators came out tonight and thanked the volunteer Commissioners for coming from all over the state to attend.

Without objection the meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Submitted by Marlene Johnston
Tape and attachments are on file